

Summary Minutes

Alexandria Waterfront Committee Meeting September 16, 2008

Members: Robert Taylor
Engin Artemel
John J. Renner II
Mel Fortney
Henry Brooks
Michael Geissinger
Peter Pennington
Jay Atkinson
Paul Smedberg
Susan Pettey
Nathan Macek

Guests: Matthew Whitestone
Stephanie Brown
Linda Hafer
Van Van Fleet
Brian V. Buzzell
Joanne Platt
Harry Harrington
Susie Cohen

City Staff: Jim Hixon
Laura Seidler
Roger Blakeley
Jack Browand

Welcome and Introductions

Committee members and guests introduced themselves.

Approval of minutes from the May meeting

It was moved and seconded to approve the minutes of the May meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion of note taking for Committee meetings. In the absence of a volunteer from the Committee to act as secretary, Chair Pettey offered to produce summary minutes, assisted by a recording of the meeting that will be produced by the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (RPCA). Meeting agendas, minutes, and attachments will be provided to Committee members via e-mail prior to the meetings. Information on the Waterfront Committee's activities will be available in two places on the RPCA web site. Jack Browand discussed the RPCA websites that highlight

Waterfront Committee activity. Committee agendas, minutes and handouts will be featured on those websites.

RPCA staff distributed a draft annual report for the Committee to submit to the City. The Chair asked for comments to be sent to her, to be collated in preparation for discussion at the next meeting.

National Harbor Update

Stephanie Brown, President and CEO of the Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association, informed the Committee that the City's promotional efforts to attract visitors from National Harbor have been effective, and that Alexandria is proving to be a significant draw for individuals staying at National Harbor. Tourism is up, particularly in the evenings when conventions at National Harbor have free evenings.

Ms. Brown feels that use of Alexandria hotel rooms may be the best measure of increased business from National Harbor, and both number of rooms in use and room revenue have increased dramatically since April. Visitor Center house have been extended to 8 PM in the evenings. The new trolley is proving very popular with visitors and residents alike, with 16,000 passengers per week during the summer. Hours have been extended from 11AM to 11 PM. The trolley is viewed as also helping Metro ridership and hotel room rentals. Potomac Riverboat Company has not released figures on water taxi riders, but Mr. Blakely noted that pedestrian counts at the Marina show three times as many people on the waterfront as before National Harbor opened.

Ms. Brown believes that more hotels are needed in Alexandria, because to her they represent the greatest value of land. She would also like to see a larger venue available for evening events.

Update on Waterfront Planning Process and Robinson Terminal Development Proposal

Faroll Hamer, Director of Alexandria's Planning and Zoning Department, briefed the Committee on the upcoming waterfront planning process, which will begin in January. A request for proposal for consultants to assist the City with the project has been released, and the City expects to have a consultant on board by January 1, 2009. The consultant's contract is expected to run for one and a half years. Ms. Hamer is interested in consultant assistance with urban design issues, since there are relatively few properties with land use issues remaining to be resolved. Ms. Hamer is also particularly interested in obtaining assistance with public participation for waterfront planning, which she views as vital to a successful plan. She anticipates using a committee comprised of key stakeholders related to the waterfront, and plans for considerable interaction between her planning committee and the Waterfront

Committee. The goal, according to Ms. Hamer, is to improve the waterfront experience for Alexandria residents as well as for businesses and visitors.

Ms. Hamer explained the Robinson Terminal Corporation's lawsuit against the City seeking declaratory judgment that it only need abide by its 1983 settlement agreement and not subsequent City Zoning requirements. She summarized the differences between the 1983 settlement agreement with Robinson Terminal Corporation and the City rezoning of the waterfront in 1992 as relating primarily to land use (a hotel would not be a permissible use on the North Robinson Terminal site under the 1992 requirements), a slightly larger floor-to-area ratio (20,000 square feet), and a slight difference in height. According to Ms. Hamer, the City sees some value in allowing a boutique hotel on the site. She also noted the value of the large dock area (about 1 acre) that is part of the site, but which the Robinson Terminal concept proposal has not addressed. Ms. Hamer stated the City's position that Robinson Terminal is required to go through the zoning process, as specified by the 1992 zoning amendments, and not achieve zoning variances without subjecting its proposals to the routine planning, zoning, and public comment processes. She noted that there is nothing prohibiting Robinson Terminal from selling the property as it is.

Report from the Committee on Boards and Commissions. The Committee considered the report, and identified the 10-year term-limit provision, a new statement of specific goals for the coming year, and question on meeting frequency as the issues that primarily related to the Waterfront Committee. Committee members declined to provide formal comments on the report. The report includes a recommendation that Committees include in their reports specific goals for the year. RPCA staff will draft goals for the Committee to include in its discussion of the annual report at the next meeting.

Update from RPCA

Roger Blakeley advised the Committee of an upcoming visit by the ship Godspeed. He also informed the Committee that he is working to secure funding for the new gates to the docks, but that the cost (\$150,000.00 for three gates) is such that he may have to purchase one gate at a time. He hopes to get one gate up this year. Mr. Blakely also reported that the City continues to seek the source of two recent diesel spills in the river. The Windmill Hill bulkhead repair is in the final stages of planning. The seawalls along the Marina are in very bad shape. The cost to repair them will be significant, but RPCA will ask again for money in its budget to do so. Mr. Blakeley also reported on the hydrilla bloom in the river, which the Committee discussed briefly.

Recognition of Julie Rasmussen and Aimee Vosper

In recognition of the work of Julie Rasmussen and Aimee Vosper in staffing the Committee, Committee members authorized the Chair to write them a

letter of thanks for their efforts and wishing them success in their new undertakings. Laura Seidler will now provide staffing for the Committee.

Announcements

Peter Pennington announced that the Environmental Policy Council is launching a blog in the next few weeks to allow comments from the public. Mr. Pennington also noted the Environmental Protection Agency as published a proposed regulation on boat engines, which it expects to take effect in 2012.

Engin Artemel announced a Nov. 8 program of Alexandrians for Smart Growth that will emphasize transportation linkages in Alexandria, particularly the trolley and water taxi. Committee members will be invited to participate.

The Committee adjourned at 9:05 AM.